MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

Address

TO

THE THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS,

DELIVERED AT THE CLOSE OF THE SESSION, 1881-2,

BY

HENRY W. CROSSKEY, LL.D.,

(MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH, BIRMINGHAM.)

"The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines."

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ADDRESS.

I HAVE the honour to be charged this afternoon with the duty of addressing words of counsel to students for the Christian ministry, on the close of another session of collegiate work.

Those who assemble here for the last time as students, and are about to enter upon the practical duties of their chosen calling, will hear to-morrow evening words of farewell on behalf of the College from the lips of the Principal, Dr. Martineau, to whom we all turn with a reverence that is only equalled by our love, and with a love that never slumbers, because it is compelled to keep pace with an ever-deepening reverence;—and will be welcomed into their new comradeship by one able to speak with the authority given by the confidence of his brethren, and than whom they will find no more trustworthy friend in the ranks they are joining.

The special task devolving upon me is to speak to those among you who have not yet completed the full term of their appointed years of studious discipline.

In one respect it is possible that I may be regarded as remarkably unfitted for the discharge of this duty. I have an almost boundless patience for the faults of young men. I believe that those young men who are most likely to do good service in the world will not always be found among the most prudent of all possible young men; will not necessarily on every occasion measure their speech with the strictest caution, and state their opinions in the most acceptable way; and are not exclusively to be numbered among those pliant conformists to the habits and customs of society who win the most thoroughly respectable reputations.

I was once told by a distinguished naval officer who had command of a gunboat in the Baltic, during the Russian War, that the admiral summoned him and other young men to his flagship, and addressed them to the following effect:—"Now, young men, you will be wanting to run your boats close to those fortifications, and get into danger and distinguish yourselves; if you do, I will cashier every one of you."

Whether or not a naval necessity existed for so prudential a warning it is not for me to decide; but I feel utterly unable to address you in a kindred spirit as I meet you to-day in your voyage among the rocks and shoals and opposing batteries of temptations established in the narrow sea of your college career. I freely admit that the heroic imprudences of young men often prove stepping-stones to mighty achievements. The soul, "by one enthusiast feeling unredeemed," may be betrayed into no mistakes, but it will win no victories.

In making this frank confession, without doubt I have an object to serve—an object which it will be better at once to own, since it is too patent to be concealed.

The door of the heart is closed, and the latch pressed down in resistance to the best advice given by a hard, dry, calculating moralist,—

> One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling,
> Nor form, nor feeling, great or small;
> A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
> An intellectual All-in-all.

But may I not hope that some heed may be paid to words spoken by an old student, who retains the intensest sympathy with a young student's hopes and prayers; who is emphatically, in every fibre of his being, a believer in the fresh young life of the world; yet who stands on the vantage ground of a practical knowledge, given by long experience of the besetting dangers and difficulties of the Ministry which you are preparing yourselves to exercise?

One who is fighting the battle in which you will soon mingle may possibly give some hints, not altogether without value, as to the armour best fitted to protect you against the fiery darts of its fury, and the sword which may prove the most serviceable weapon in cleaving a way through the principalities and powers which will be arrayed against you.

The relation between your present work as students, and your future calling as Christian Ministers, is the subject upon which I wish to speak.

At the very outset, the gravest of difficulties presents itself.

The Christian Ministry is the last of all professions in which scholarship, as scholarship, can reveal the secret of power. You may possess all the learning of the schools; you may honourably distinguish yourselves by taking high

degrees; and yet prove unable to awaken a sense of guilt within the sinful, to renew the life of wandering and desolate souls with a Christ-like spirit, to give comfort to the broken-hearted. Out of the fountains of faith and hope and love alone can living waters flow for the refreshment and redemption of our race. In the great emergencies of your career, mechanical rules of conduct will avail little. You will have to traverse paths along which no mortal man can guide.

If you have any business here at all as students for the Christian Ministry, you know what it is to be moved by a Spirit, a Power, a Presence, you cannot resist; and to hear a strange and awful Voice, speaking in the innermost chamber of your own sacred manhood, and calling you to the work of the Lord of righteousness.

Upon that Power must be placed your life-long reliance, and to that Voice must be yielded the life-long direction of your toil.

But this, the most solemn of human experiences, may become the source of the most dangerous of temptations.

You may be tempted to feel, if not to think—and our gravest dangers arise from feelings that do not crystallise themselves into definite principles of action—that severe scholastic studies have no very practical bearing at all upon your future calling.

The curriculum of the College may appear to stand in somewhat violent contrast with apostolic commands. Paul directs those who would be strong in the Lord to wear the breastplate of righteousness; to have their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; to take the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit. The authorities of the College bid you take your degree; and then concern yourselves with Biblical history and criticism;

with the Greek and Latin fathers; with mental, ethical, and religious philosophy.

What virtue is there (it may be asked) in history and criticism when hot blood courses through the veins, and the poor victim must know the Gospel of the grace of God, or he is lost? What light do Greek and Latin fathers throw upon the misery, the pauperism, the crime of the nineteenth century? What avails philosophy in dealing with the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life?

I am here to-day, however, to say, speaking from a not inconsiderable experience, that the more intense your conviction that the end and aim of Christianity is to establish the Kingdom of God upon earth, and the more earnest your resolve to devote yourselves to that divine task, the stronger should be your desire to obtain as thoroughly complete an education as you have talent and opportunity to compass.

The meaning of the scheme of studies through which you have to pass is not merely that it imparts knowledge, but that it trains the man.

A technical education fails even in securing a technical purpose. Unless a curriculum of study embrace subjects not likely to be of practical use in the student's future career, it will not succeed in preparing for that career itself. The making of machinery is one thing; the fashioning of capable men is another. "I call, therefore" (Milton nobly writes), "a complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, magnanimously, all the offices both private and public of peace and war."

Believe me, the world's work is very serious, and strong men are needed to undertake it.

Moreover, you will find one strange peculiarity in the pro-

fession you are adopting—it will offer some opportunity of using almost every fragment of human knowledge.

One of the great intellectual surprises of my life has been the discovery of the usefulness of apparently useless studies. I have never done an honest piece of work on any subject, however far away from my pressing and immediate duties, that has not ultimately proved of advantage to me.

After all, however—it may be pleaded—we have not to become scholars so much as practical men, capable of dealing with the world, its interests, and its people.

Let me give, on this point, my emphatic testimony to the absolute necessity of habits of abstract study to meet the practical requirements of the busiest ministerial life.

Professionally, I suppose I am as closely engaged as any doctor or lawyer with an average amount of practice. In my day, I have had as much to do with the affairs of men as any ordinary member of society.

I have found abstract study an absolute necessity of life; and, indeed, I have been a harder student since I left College than at College itself.

It is not merely that no preacher can keep producing sermons and lectures without supplying the waste—any more than water can for ever be poured out of a jug without replenishing it—but that the quietness, and peace, and strength given by study are essential for a busy man if he would keep his head clear, and fresh, and healthful for his daily work.

There is another and a deeper reason.

Not only is it true that there is no inevitable antagonism between scholastic culture and religious fervour, but it is equally true that the more spiritual our Christian faith the greater the need for the strictest training of college life, that we may become its fitting ministers.

What is our position as ministers of him who said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life"?

We have no stock-in-trade of external articles of faith to keep in our Church as in a shop, and dispense through the community.

We appeal very humbly, very reverently, but very directly to the God who made us, and beseech Him to pour out His spirit upon us.

As the light falls from the pure ether of His presence upon the dense medium of our minds, it is certain that through our ignorance it will be bent and broken from its direct course; but how necessary is it that we should solemnly prepare ourselves by the completest culture to distort His light as little as it may prove possible for mortal man to do!

Gazing upwards in the search for His truth, how needful is it to be on our guard lest

> We do as little children do,
> Who lean their faces on the window pane
> To sigh the glass dim with their own breath-stain,
> And shut the sky and landscape from the view.

Had we only a statute book to interpret, we might be satisfied with a less amount of scholarship; grammar and dictionary might do our work. Appealing as we do to the Eternal Spirit to visit our souls, the completest possible culture is the only fitting preparation for His presence.

The spiritual Christianity which at first sight seems best able to dispense with the education of the scholar, thus, in sober truth, marks its absence with the greater shame.

It ill becomes those who seek the inspiration of the living God to hang up a harp with broken strings to be swept by the wind of His power.

Turning from these general considerations, the question arises, what special studies are likely to prove of the largest value to a Christian minister labouring among the Free Churches of England?

The critical study of the Bible appears to me to have a supreme importance for the teacher of spiritual Christianity, and yet it is a study which he is not unnaturally disposed to undervalue.

So long as the Bible was received as an infallible text-book of ethics and faith, accurate knowledge of the construction of each sentence and the import of every phrase, was a matter of life and death. Heaven and hell hung in the very balance of critical inquiry. A grammatical blunder might plunge the erring soul into the depths of perdition.

The period of attack upon the theory of Biblical infallibility has been an exciting one. There was the charm of intellectual daring in searching the Bible through and through, while the thunder of theologic wrath was rolling in the sky, and angry lightning was flashing through the darkness of popular superstition.

Hot debates touching signs of human passion in the supposed deeds of the great Jehovah; myths and legends inserted among narratives, hitherto most surely believed, and colourings and discolourings of historic fact attributable to the brush of priestly prejudice, flung upon familiar pages the fierce interests of a battle-field.

For us, at any rate, the raging conflict has now ceased; the principle of Scriptural interpretation is decided, and our controversies affect details of its application alone. More than this, in quietness of thought many of us have come to see that the mere act of denying the truth of an ancient narrative does not necessarily involve a richer,

riper, purer Christian spirit than the mere act of accepting it. The critical and exegetical study of the books of the Old and New Testament is not equivalent to the breathing of a prayer from the depths of our sin to a Lord enthroned in righteousness.

Historical questions must be decided on historical evidence, but a series of historical essays cannot touch the heart either of a sinner in his sin or a saint in his sanctity.

The mere knowledge as to whether the histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah be or be not correctly recorded, or whether water were or were not turned into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, can neither strengthen nor weaken the soul in its struggles against temptation and its love for the holiness of Christ.

It does not follow, however, that a minister "of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the spirit," can afford to dispense with critical investigations.

On the contrary, the spirit of the Bible will become intelligible as the actual development of the religious history it chronicles is accurately studied. The Bible will help us to give a divine interpretation to the history of England in so far as we understand the special conditions under which its books were written. We cannot separate transient Judaic methods of thought and action from the everlasting laws of God, save as we carefully follow the actual course of Jewish history.

To wield the power of the prophets effectually against modern iniquities we must know why, and how, in their day and generation, kings and priests trembled before their words.

The relationship of Jesus Christ to the political and sectarian parties and the social circumstances of his age will

give the key to the life which he might be expected to lead in London at this hour.

A teacher of spiritual Christianity is in constant danger of becoming far too abstract in his methods of thought. His besetting temptation is to weave subtle theories in the dim depths of his own self-consciousness, and to deal with men and women as though they were always ready to be influenced by the most rational arguments that he can present for their consideration.

In the actual world in which we live a fathomless ocean of human passion rolls from pole to pole, and when tempestuous winds blow, all our logical syllogisms, sermonisings, appeals to reason, preachments of moral precepts, are tossed like broken timbers of wrecked ships upon the disturbed waves.

The Bible is the book that tells the secrets of our passion-tossed humanity. Sinners read of a sweet singer of Israel whose heart was stained with their guilt. Sceptics read of a king wise above every other in Jerusalem, who shared their doubt and despair. The tried and tempted read of one who would fain have cursed God and died. The timid and fearful read of a disciple who, with cursing and swearing, denied his Master.

All the weakness, the strife, the horror, the cruelty, and the agony of human life are there; and above all stands the cross, the witness of triumphant victory.

Although rational investigation be pushed to the uttermost, it remains the first duty of a religious teacher to understand the Bible; and the surgeon might as well plead that he need pay no attention to anatomy because his duty is to restore life, as a minister that he need not concern himself with Biblical criticism, because he would fain preach the gospel of the spirit.

In your future career it seems to me increasingly certain that you will have to deal with a nation in which science will occupy a throne of supreme authority, and in which truth will be sought through scientific methods. The study of science I would therefore strenuously urge upon you, as of the largest practical importance for your proper ministerial preparation.

The recognition of science which now characterises so large a class of our most cultivated Englishmen, will, I believe, most certainly spread rapidly through the great mass of our population. I have reason for holding this belief. Where scientific demonstrations have already been introduced into public elementary schools, their effect has been marvellous. I have had the opportunity of closely watching the results of thorough scientific instruction, systematically given in some elementary schools situated in the poorest districts of a large town. It has been received by even the roughest children as a revelation; and has without doubt opened to them a new world of unexpected delight. Moreover, it has been proved by the experience already gained that a remarkable scientific faculty exists among the working classes of society. Lads, living in daily contact with hard physical realities, prove themselves peculiarly capable of receiving physical ideas.

As an evidence of this, let me quote from a report lately made to the Birmingham School Board by Prof. Poynting upon the results of an examination in science, of scholars attending public elementary schools:—"Hardly any of the questions in my paper could be answered without independent thought on the part of the candidates; and I had very few answers showing a want of such thought. The boys showed that they had seen and understood the experiments

which they described, that they had been taught to reason for themselves upon them, and that they were not merely using forms of words which they had learnt without attaching physical ideas to them."

You will not be long in the ministry, gentlemen, without hearing much discussion on the duties of our churches in relation to the masses of the people; let me remind you that lads such as these will grow into the men whom you will have to address. The season in which Christian ministers were called upon to administer milk to babes—if it ever existed—is hopelessly gone. If you are to sustain faith in God among the great mass of our people you will have to meet them upon their own intellectual ground, and to follow the paths along which their own native genius guides their thoughts.

If the day of faith is again to dawn—again, as of old, the chariot of its sun must break through the golden portals of the mystic sky. Again, as of old, must the strange sequence of the changeful seasons, the growth of the seed and the ripening of the harvest, the welling of fountains, the flow of rivers and the rolling of seas, the rushing of the wind, the coming and going of the stars in their courses, be recognized as witnesses of the Life beyond all life.

We must come back to Nature—from whose bosom our forefathers drew the sweet sustenance of their infant hopes touching things eternal; and in our manhood humbly ask whether her gracious hand will not again lead her children to the solemn temple hidden in the deep woods of her benignant peace; and whether her voice will not again whisper into listening ears the secrets of the Kingdom of God.

The glory of the heaven and the earth may yet avail to win from the proud and scornful and rebellious heart the cry of Job, when the Lord had answered him out of the

whirlwind—"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Souls outwearied with theological debates may yet yield to the charms of those lilies of the field which Christ so tenderly loved.

Doubts and despairs which defy the logic of the schools may yet vanish before simple confidence in the order of a universe in which not a sparrow falleth to the ground unheeded and unwatched.

In a hard-working world, developing to the utmost the mechanical agencies by which its comforts and luxuries can be increased, science may awaken that sense of the Infinite, that solemn awe, that conviction of the unutterable majesty of all created things, which will constitute the very soil in which Christian faith can take root and grow. If we would convince men that no measurable physical force can explain the endurance of martyrs; that no chemical combination is an equivalent of the action of the will; that no variations among species occupying the same plane of being and acting for and by themselves, can bring into existence a living soul dowered with a sense of duty, a capacity for boundless love, and an immortal hope, we must know the range and limits of scientific methods.

Those who attempt to defend faith against science, without having themselves received any training in the methods of scientific research, will easily be smitten to the ground by the rudest flint implement of an argument, wielded by the more skilful hands of men accustomed to deal with physical ideas and physical realities.

The history of the religious life of England, and especially

the history of that group of Free Churches which this College represents, ought, I think, to receive the special attention of students for our ministry.

To treat the various sects that divide among themselves the power of England merely as assemblies of men attached to certain doctrines is to misread their meaning, to underrate their influence, and to ignore their piety.

Every English sect represents some element of a divine life which has charmed English hearts and swayed English history.

Each Church existing amongst us as the product of our national history has a Holy of Holies, and whoever has not passed through the outer court and penetrated behind its veil has not seen the secret of its life. Earnest and devout men are not members of the Church of England, Baptists, Independents, Wesleyans, simply because they are logically convinced of the truth of certain systems of theology severally covered by the names they bear, but because of the type of character they esteem as the most Christ-like; the dreams and visions they cherish of a kingdom of God upon earth; the special temptations besetting them the most keenly; the channels through which they practically feel that tidings of the divine mercy are most quickly and most abundantly poured within their longing and thirsty souls.

If we address the various sects by which we are surrounded as though they were the mushroom growth of a night, merely representing the crop of theological opinions which has sprung up in our own day and generation, we might as well preach to the plants in our gardens, so far as any chance of touching the heart of the religious life of England is concerned.

You, gentlemen, have the ideal of a Christian Church,

handed down to you from faithful forefathers, and committed to your guardian care. The Church of Christ you will have in charge that the fire upon its altar may be kept burning, is the Church in which a life akin in spirit to that led by the great Master is esteemed the one thing needful; in which Reason and Conscience are trusted as the gifts of God to reveal his Righteousness and his Truth, and in which the chiefest sacraments are human services.

You will not be sent forth as dogmatists to enforce a confession of faith, but as quickeners of the spirit to awaken penitence, aspiration, hope, and love.

It is not that you will be charged with the duty of holding no opinions whatever; and professing no convictions. God forbid!

Mere vagueness of thought is no virtue. Let each student among you learn to think clearly, and to speak as clearly as he thinks.

Should it so happen that the world christens your individual opinions Unitarian, so be it; let them bear the name by which they are best understood.

Be afraid of no heresy. Stand, if need be, on the loneliest heights of unfriended thoughts,—

> "There is no danger now of knowing aught
> Which ought not to be known,"

—but learn to value infinitely more highly than either heresy or orthodoxy those sanctities of the kingdom of God which are the possession of all His beloved.

Because, indeed, of the very spirituality of the work required of you, the greater is the necessity that you should be wise with the wisdom of the great company of His saints gathered from the north and the south, and the east and the west; and know well the myriad links that bind the

minds and hearts of living men to the dwellers in the unseen land.

Your words will be increased a thousand-fold in power if you do not speak as solitary pilgrims journeying through a country of which you barely understand the language, and have neither taken the trouble to trace the history nor grasp the genius, but as men moving among brethren, brought up in the same household, using the one mother-tongue, and accompanied by a cloud of witnesses who can testify what the Lord has done in times past for the souls of those who have pleaded against, the demands of hierarchies, for the rights of reason and of conscience; and who have fearlessly trusted their destiny, alike in time and in eternity, to the tenderness of His mercy and the largeness of His love.

Gentlemen, do not underrate, during this period of preparation for active duty, the strength of the moral and spiritual forces against which you will have to contend. The work before you will task your uttermost energies, your profoundest patience, your most glowing enthusiasm.

Many a time in the stress of inevitable struggles you will look back with a sigh upon these quiet college days, and wish that you had more carefully buckled on your armour and more surely tempered your weapons.

In the fervour and gladness of young self-consecration, I know well how readily it is believed that the truth has but to be spoken for all the world to listen; that the blast of God's message has but to be sounded for the towers of superstition to fall in ruins at our feet. I, for one, however, do not believe that all England is thirsting for our simple Christianity. I see on every hand the rallying of hosts we have fondly deemed long ago put to flight. I hear on every

side the tramp of armed men, ready to renew the contest we have vainly fancied almost ended, on behalf of ancient ceremonies and creeds.

It is quite as likely as not—to my mind more likely than otherwise—that the vast crowds of our people who are notoriously indifferent to religion, in their first awakening will seize hold of fantastic and extravagant forms of superstition, and cling to them with a firm, strong grasp.

The easiest part of your work, however, will be this conflict with theological dogmas, troublesome and full of anxiety as it may prove. Your higher and more difficult task will be the reverent cherishing of a type of Christian holiness within the churches of rational thought, as beautiful, as pure, as lovable, and as self-devoted, as that which has for centuries been clothed with other intellectual raiments than those which you can honestly employ.

Your fitting preparation for *this* task does not rest with your professors and advisers. It depends upon the faithfulness with which you keep your hearts "unspotted from the world," the prayerfulness with which you carry on your severest scholastic studies, and the reverence with which you daily seek the protecting and guiding spirit of your God.

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